

## Allegra restaurant may be deep in east London, but it's worth the schlep



**T**he east London dining scene is on the up as Allegra opens on the 7th floor of the Stratford Hotel.

### Behind the scenes

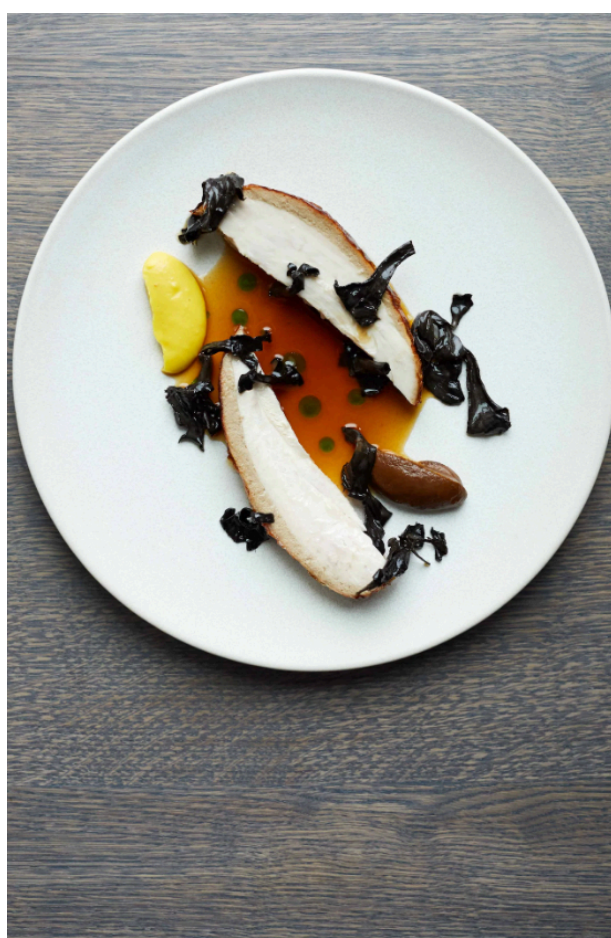
The twin involvement of property developer Harry Handelsman (behind Chiltern Firehouse etc) and Irish ex-'Chiltz' chef Patrick Powell saw Allegra being declared hotly, breathlessly, feverishly anticipated long before I, truth be told, had strong feelings either way.

Now it's open, I'm rejoicing: Powell may not be a 'name' outside chef circles, but judging by the steady stream of chefs choosing Allegra on their days off, he ought to be.

### The concept

Handelsman had a vision of a 42-storey 'vertical community' comprising hotel, lofts, sky gardens and two restaurants (a street-level brasserie and Allegra on the seventh floor).





First, a word about the location: it's in E20, at the backend of Westfield, beside the hubristically named Stratford International.

If you don't commute from Kent and you're not involved with the new V&A, Sadler's Wells, UCL or London College of Fashion outposts that will, by 2023, make up London's new 'East Bank', you may be inclined to overlook Allegra, but that would be a pity.

For triple threat Allegra – food, wine and exemplary cocktails – is 2023-ready now.

Interiors, by Noma designers Space Copenhagen, are undeniably beautiful in their cool Nordic way but on a rain-lashed east London night, all views obscured, they offer about as much sense of place as an airport hotel.

## What's cooking?

Here's why all the chefs love Powell: he has the full set of old school skills (bread, butter, charcuterie, pastry and butchery are all done in-house) coupled with an eye for what's next.



A spread of wheaten bread and crudités from Allegra's own farm (some fresh, some pickled) speaks of jolly meals at a country kitchen table while French onion soup, contrastingly, is not the winter warmer I expect but a clear broth of uncommon intensity with a dainty wafer accessorised with kisses of cheese custard and pickled walnut.

To follow, we share a cast iron skillet of sake-poached turbot with congee and kohlrabi flecked with roasted chicken skin. We might equally have split a whole roast chicken stuffed with ceps.



Regarding wine, it's rare to find an interesting list this far east. Allegra's rewards risk-takers with frisky pét nats, field blends and textural skin contact pours as well as Grandes Marques and triple-digit clarets.

## Signature dishes

What's a destination restaurant without a destination dish or two? Smoked eel pithivier, a shiny-domed puff pastry pie enclosing eel and confit potato, is a masterly creation and a quite a diversion from East End pie 'n' mash.



As for the pistachio choux buns with silky smooth chicken liver parfait and pickled kumquat, order them in multiples. Every week is pastry week at Allegra.

## Best for

Al fresco. The terrace menu includes Cuban sandwich, chicken buns and salt beef croquettes. Wrap up warm folks.

*Allegra, The Stratford, 20 International Way, London, E20 1FD, 020 3973 0545, [allegra-restaurant.com](http://allegra-restaurant.com)*